

MEXICO'S NEW CONSTITUTION.

On March 11th, General Venustiano Carranza, first chief of the Constitutionalist army, was elected president of Mexico for four years. Following his election a new constitution was promulgated which goes into effect the first of next May. This provides for some very radical and remarkable changes in Mexican law.

The points of special interest to our readers will probably be those in connection with religion and schools. It provides for so-called religious freedom, but the exercise of religion is hedged about by so many restrictions that it will be hard to find its freedom.

The Catholic Church will either be forced out of the country, or will be required to make so many changes, its best friends will not be able to recognize it. It forbids anyone but a native-born Mexican to be a minister in any church, and this, we are told, drives 2,500 Catholic priests out of the country. At the same time it will require all ordained missionaries of the Protestant churches to give up their ministerial and educational work.

Here is the section of the Constitution bearing on this subject:

It is the prerogative of the powers of the federation to exercise such intervention as the laws may provide in religious worship and external discipline. Other authorities shall act as auxiliaries of the federation.

Congress may not enact laws establishing or prohibiting any religion whatever.

The law does not recognize the individuality of any religious group designated as a church.

The ministers of the congregations shall be considered persons exercising a profession and shall be directly amenable to the laws which may be formulated regarding it.

State Legislatures may only determine, according to local needs, the maximum number of ministers for the congregations.

To be a minister in Mexico of any religious cult, it is necessary to be a Mexican by birth.

Ministers of the congregation may never, at a public reunion or at private gatherings convened as committees, nor in the ceremonies of worship, nor in religious propaganda, criticize the fundamental laws of the country, the authorities in particular nor the government in general; they shall have neither passive nor active vote nor the right to league themselves together for political purposes.

In order to devote new buildings to purposes of worship, the consent of the Department of Gobernacion shall be required and the Government of the State have a previous hearing on the matter. There must be in each temple some person in charge of it and responsible to the authorities for the fulfillment of the laws on religious discipline in said temple as well as for the objects belonging to the congregation.

The person in charge of each temple, together with ten other residents, shall at once notify the municipal authority who the person is who is in charge of said temple. Notice of every change shall be given by the departing minister accompanied by the new incumbent and ten other residents. The municipal authorities, under penalty of removal from their posts and a fine not to exceed 1,000 pesos for each offense, shall compel the observance of this disposition; under the same conditions they shall keep a register of all temples and another of all persons in charge of them. The municipal authority shall notify the Department of Gobernacion, through the State Government, of the granting of permission for the opening of any new temple. Gifts, except of real estate, may be collected in the temples.

Under no condition shall studies carried on in institutions devoted to the professional training of theologians be validated, authorized, or otherwise given official standing. Any authority which shall violate this provision shall be criminally responsible and the dispensation or authorization shall be null and shall carry with it the invalidation of the professional title for the granting of which the offense was committed.

Another section of the Constitution throws restrictions around all public worship, and places all such worship under the control of the civil authorities. It forbids any gathering for worship outside of an established church. This is the section of the Constitution bearing on this subject:

Every man is free to profess the religious belief which may be most agreeable to him and to practice the ceremonies, devotions, or other acts of the corresponding cult in the churches or in his home so long as these do not constitute a crime or offense punishable by law.

Every act of public worship shall take place in the churches, which shall be at all times under the supervision of the authorities.

Provisions in regard to education are almost as radical. The Constitution provides for free schools, but limits all instruction in these schools to laymen, and requires that all primary schools shall be entirely under the control of the Government. Schools of higher grades may be established but they, too, must be under governmental control.

This is shown by the following section of the Constitution:

Learning is free; that which is imparted in official educational institutions shall be laic as well as the primary, elementary and superior learning imparted in private institutions.

No religious body, nor any minister of any sect, may establish or direct schools for primary instruction.

Private schools may be established only subject to official supervision.

As will be seen this will prevent any school being established and conducted by missionaries, for any except higher branches of learning, and even the location of those schools must be settled by the government, and must be under the supervision of the government officials.

Probably the severest blow struck the Catholic Church is the provision forbidding the taking of monastic vows. Hereafter there may be no monasteries or convents or any institutions of the kind in the whole country.

This is the section of the Constitution covering this point:

The State may not permit the fulfillment of any contract, pact or agreement the object of which is the curtailment, loss or irrevocable sacrifice of the liberty of man whether for purposes of work, education or religious vow. The law, consequently, does not permit the establishment of monastic orders, whatever may be their denomination or the object under pretense of which they are founded.

With the primary schools taken entirely away from the Catholic Church, and their religious orders banished from the land, it seems hard to see how that Church will be able to maintain an existence in the country.

At this distance it is hard to tell whether this new Constitution will really benefit the country or not. It looks almost like an attempt to abolish religion, and yet preserve its outward form. It certainly will be a great blessing to the country to get rid of monastic orders and foreign-born Catholic priests, who, for centuries, have controlled the politics, education and religion of the people.

It is to be sincerely hoped that some modifications of the restrictions will be secured which will enable the missionary work which has been conducted in the country to be carried on and extended.

Another section of the Constitution makes provisions for the working man in several very important matters. It provides that he shall have one day of rest for every six working days. The working day is made eight hours. Careful provision is made for the protection of women and children in their work. Strikes on the part of employees, and lock-outs on the part of employers are both declared to be lawful.

Great restrictions are placed on foreign ownership of land, or of business concessions. No foreigner may acquire property rights within 100 kilometers of the frontier of the country, or within 50 kilometers of the coasts.

Evidently this is intended to prevent any property owner along the coast or on the border giving any assistance to an invading enemy.

We can only hope that the government under the new Constitution, and new president, may become peaceably and firmly established, and we believe that many of these radical restrictions will be modified as time goes on.

OUR CANDIDATES.

The last General Assembly appointed a committee of the professors of theology in our seminaries, to prepare a section of the Book of Church Order, "defining the way candidates for the ministry are to be received, and so forth."

What that "so forth" means we do not know, but we are thoroughly convinced that there ought to be more oversight of our candidates both in their reception and in their management and control, and in a more sympathetic contact with them.

Most Presbyteries are content to come into some slight contact with the young man when he applies as a candidate to be received under the care of the Presbytery, and then think no more of him until he applies for licensure, and ordination, six or ten years later.

Most Presbyterian Committees of Christian Education think they have done their full duty when they endorse the candidate's application for aid from the Executive Committee, or assign parts of trial for licensure. Is it any wonder that candidates are a law unto themselves? They preach without licensure. God bless them, they do preach, and "the common people hear them gladly." We would not hinder, but guide them in this life work thus begun.

They go from place to place preaching within or without the bounds of Presbyteries for the whole summer, and pay no heed often to the call of their home Presbytery. No minister can accept work without his Presbytery without the consent of the Presbytery to which he belongs, and of the Presbytery in whose bounds he labors. Who ever heard of a candidate asking Presbytery's consent to labor out of its bounds? We have known more than one instance where the candidate coolly told the Presbytery that called him to labor in its bounds that the Holy Spirit had called him to another to which he wanted to go. Another said that "circumstances" were such that he could not obey Presbytery.

Are we not thus teaching our candidates that lawful authority is not to be considered when personal self-interest comes?

Would it not be a wise teaching on the part of professors, that the Presbytery is the law in a minister's life?

But we put the blame of this lawless state of affairs on the Presbyters. I am sure that the Presbytery of which the writer was a candidate did not know, nor very much care, where he was or what he was doing. We are constrained to believe that such is generally the case. In that most trying time in a young man's life—when the Session no longer feels it has first place in a man's life—he is a candidate of the Presbytery—the average Presbytery treats him worse than the proverbial step-child.

Is it right?

The most important chairmanship in a Presbytery is that of Christian Education. The most sympathetic and wisest man ought to be at its head. And Presbytery ought to know and feel the keenest interest in the young man. Much time and prayer ought to be given to him and his doings. We confess our shortcomings in this particular.

Then we ought to insist on our candidates using their gifts in our bounds if possible, and if without our bounds in a Presbytery to whose care we can commend them.

Our seminaries are not altogether blame-